

**DEEPWATER HORIZON RESPONSE:
LOOP CURRENT PRESS CONFERENCE CALL**

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**SPEAKERS:
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OPERATOR: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are on a listen-only mode. To ask a question during the question-and-answer session, please press * then 1 on your touchtone phone. Questions will be limited to one at that time. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect. Now, I'd like to turn the meeting over to your host, Mr. Justin Kenney. Sir, you may begin.

JUSTIN KENNEY: Thank you and good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us today for a briefing to discuss the BP oil spill's trajectory in relation to the Loop Current. My name is Justin Kenney, director of communications at NOAA. I do want to note that the wildlife briefing originally scheduled for this time has been rescheduled to noon, Central, 1:00 Eastern time; same number and password as you used for this call. And you can refer to the Deepwater Horizon website for more information about that call.

Joining me on the call today is Dr. Jane Lubchenco, NOAA administrator. That is L-U-B-C-H-E-N-C-O. Also, we are expecting Adm. Thad Allen, United States Coast Guard and National Incident commander, to be joining us on this call as well. With us in the room from NOAA are Drs. Steven Murawsky, S-T-E-V-E-N M-U-R-A-W-S-K-Y. Dr. Murawsky is the director of scientific programs and chief science advisor for NOAA Fisheries – and Dave Westerholm. Dave, common spelling, Westerholm – W-E-S-T-E-R-H-O-L-M. Mr. Westerholm is director of NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration.

Dr. Lubchenco in a moment will provide opening remarks, after which time we will take your questions. Please, when we get to the question-and-answer session, identify yourself and your affiliation and limit your questions to one per person so that we can make every effort to get to as many questions as possible. And with that, I would like to turn it over to Dr. Jane Lubchenco, please.

JANE LUBCHENCO: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us. There's been a lot of public interest and concern about oil entering the Loop Current and what it might mean for Florida, the East Coast and wildlife. We have been taking this possibility seriously from the outset and have been monitoring it closely. So what I'd like to do today is to talk a little bit about what the Loop Current is, how we're monitoring its proximity to the oil slick, what happens when oil enters the current and what the federal government is doing to ensure public safety and awareness.

The Loop Current is an area of warm water that comes up from the Caribbean flowing past the Yucatán peninsula and into the Gulf of Mexico. From there, it generally curves east across the Gulf and then flows south parallel to the West Coast of Florida. As it flows between Florida and Cuba, it becomes the Florida Current, which moves through the Florida Straits, where it eventually joins the Gulf Stream to travel up the Atlantic Coast.

Both the location of the Loop Current and the location of the oil slick are dynamic. They move around from day to day. The present location of the oil is identified daily through analysis of satellite imagery, observer overflights with helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft as well as advanced sensing technology on the aircraft.

Satellite imagery on May 17 indicates that the main bulk of the oil is dozens of miles away from the Loop Current but that a tendril of light oil has been transported down close to the Loop Current. NOAA is conducting aerial surveys today to determine with certainty whether oil has actually entered the Loop Current.

NOAA conducts aerial observations every day to observe the oil plume from the air. These observations help develop NOAA's trajectory models. In addition, today, the NOAA P-3 research aircraft will be dropping sensors to get better observations of the location of the Loop Current.

The proximity of the southeast tendril of oil to the Loop Current indicates that oil is increasingly likely to become entrained if it is not already. When that occurs, oil could reach the Florida Straits in eight to 10 days. Once entrained in the Loop Current, persistent onshore winds and/or oil getting into an eddy on the edge of the Loop Current would be required to bring the oil onto the Florida shoreline.

During the transit time the oil is in the Loop Current, the natural processes of evaporation and dispersion would reduce the oil volume significant and change its nature and character. The remaining oil could be composed of emulsified streamers, long strips, and mostly tar balls. I mentioned earlier that the Loop Current is dynamic.

At present, at the top end of the Loop Current is a counter-clockwise eddy, thus some fraction of the oil could be drawn into this eddy and remain there, heading to the northeast. And some fraction could enter the main Loop Current where it might eventually head to the Florida Straits.

NOAA will continue to closely monitor this portion of the oil over the next days to weeks. I emphasize that the bulk of the oil remains well to the north of the Loop Current, near the well site, and towards the west and northwest from there. Currently, only the southern tip of the slick, consisting of sheens of potentially unobserved tar balls, is in the vicinity of the Loop Current.

In response to the possibility of oil entering the Loop Current, NOAA is acting with an abundance of caution and announcing an expansion of the fishery closure area at noon today, 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time. The revised closure will be effective at 6:00 p.m. this evening. Information about the precise location of the closure is available at noaa.gov. This closure totals 45,728 square miles and represents around 19 percent of the entire Gulf of Mexico federal waters. The expansion of the fishery closure is one part of a proactive stance that NOAA is taking to ensure public safety and seafood safety.

To ensure the safety of the seafood harvested from the Gulf of Mexico, NOAA is working with the Food and Drug Administration, FDA, to realign its access to implement a broad-scale seafood-sampling plan. The plan includes sampling seafood from inside and outside the closed areas as well as dockside and market-based sampling.

Also, NOAA is increasing its monitoring of the biological implications of oil and dispersants. State governors and international colleagues have been alerted of the closure-area expansion and the joint NOAA/FDA seafood sampling plan. The incident command center that was stood up in St. Pete's more than a week ago is ready to be engaged quickly should the need arise.

There is no indication yet whether the oil might impact another country. We will notify and consult with other nations as appropriate. The United States and Mexico are currently sharing information under the MEXUS Plan – M-E-X-U-S – a bilateral agreement on pollution incidents in coastal waters. NOAA is engaging experts within and outside this government to develop long-term oil movement forecasts predicting where the oil may go. If the release continues, this allows for adequate response measures and resources to be placed in appropriate locations.

The oil spill is unprecedented and dynamic. From the outset, the federal response has been aggressive, strategic and science-based. As situations change and as we gain new information, we will continually reevaluate our response, strategies and actions and planning. NOAA stands shoulder to shoulder with Gulf communities during these challenging times and we work closely with our federal partners to respond to this spill.

In closing, let me simply say that this is a time for awareness and preparation but not overreaction. We take these situations very seriously and we'll continue to be forward-leaning, as we have from the outset. Thank you and I'd be happy to respond to questions and involve my colleagues, Mr. Westerholm or Dr. Murawsky, as appropriate.

MR. KENNEY: Thank you, Dr. Lubchenco. And, Operator, before we go to the calls, I wanted to check and see if Adm. Allen was able to join us yet.

OPERATOR: I do not see that he is connected, however let me state, if you're sitting with someone else, sir, please press *0; we'll open your line right away.

MR. KENNEY: Thank you, Operator.

OPERATOR: You're welcome.

MR. KENNEY: Okay, with that, we welcome questions. If you could moderate that portion for us please, Operator.

OPERATOR: Thank you. If you would like to ask a question now, please press * then 1. We'll ask you to limit your question to simply one at this time. Our first from Andrew Gully with AFP. Your line is open now. (Pause.) Andrew Gully with AFP? (Pause.) I'll move on. Elizabeth Grossman, Earth Island Journal. Your line is open.

Q: Thank you. The question I have is can Dr. Lubchenco or anybody else present tell us a bit more in specific about what is being moderated for in terms of impacts from the oil and also particularly from the dispersants at this time?

MS. LUBCHENCO: Dave, do you want to take that?

DAVE WESTERHOLM: Certainly. This is Dave Westerholm. We're looking at a number of factors in addition to some species collection and tissue sampling. Right at the wellhead site during the application of subsea dispersants, there are a number of tests.

And if you go on the website, you can see the monitoring plan. Those tests include a toxicity test, dissolved oxygen, fluorescence, particle size so that we can track the plume as well as find out some of the physical and biological components. That is an adaptive monitoring plan where we with – as we find out more information, we can add additional tests depending on what we see the plume and where it's going.

OPERATOR: Our next request from Andrew Revkin, New York Times.

Q: Hi, thanks for holding this call, Dr. Lubchenco and others. Some scientists, independent scientists, are still very concerned about the lack of adequate video being released by BP of the flow at the wellhead on the seabed.

Is there any plan – is NOAA satisfied? Are you getting basically all the video that's being transmitted by BP to its own people? Does NOAA get to monitor that, and/or do you have any plans to have your own submersibles doing any kind of tracking independently of what's going on down there?

MS. LUBCHENCO: Hi, Andy. Thanks for that question. This is Jane Lubchenco. We are working closely with the Unified Command to get as much information as possible from BP and we'll continue to do so. There have been various ideas about deployment of additional vehicles to do more sensing at the leak. But the priority at this point is to stop the flow of oil. And that priority has been uppermost in everyone's mind. That really is the first order of business – stopping the flow of oil. And that will continue to be the case until it is – until the flow has been stopped.

OPERATOR: Our next request: Curtis Morgan, Miami Herald. Your line is open.

Q: Yeah, hi. The Times had a story the other day about the deepwater plumes stuff below the surface. It seems like most of the tracking is directed at surface images. How much do you know about what is under the water and the direction that is taking?

MS. LUBCHENCO: The bulk of our information comes from surface observations. We have redeployed a number of research vessels and other ships to remobilize our assets and obtain information about where the oil may be, subsurface. That is a considerable challenge given the area that is involved, but it's vitally important that we track that, and are in the process of doing exactly that.

The discoveries from the research vessel Pelican that recently returned to port are the first reports that we have. The results from those are currently being analyzed. We look forward to

seeing those full results once they have been both analyzed and the instruments have been calibrated. And this is an area that is clearly very important for us to continue to monitor and track and stay on top of.

OPERATOR: Our next from Jim Polson, Bloomberg News.

Q: Now, I'd like to follow up on that a little bit. How much is known about the directions of these currents below the surface? And initially, will you really be dealing only with maybe the first 300 feet or 300 meters?

STEVEN MURAWSKY: This is Steve Murawsky. Let me talk a little bit about tracking in deep water. What we're trying to do is not only model the surface current vectors but also the intermediate and deep currents. The way we do that is NOAA has deployed a number of devices from the air which actually give us a temperature and salinity structure, which help to tune the models.

And we've got a number of projections at 800 meters, 400 meters and then actually at 1500. Below 50 meters, the velocity of this current falls off dramatically. And the general tracking from those models indicates that there's a southwestern flow particularly at depth. And so this gives us some clue, number one, that it's much less quick in terms of any potential arrival time later on, and that the directionality is nominally different than the flow that we're talking about here in terms of entrainment in Loop Current.

That being said, the data that have been obtained so far are actually right around the vicinity of the wellhead and not downstream. And so as Dr. Lubchenco talked about, we're trying to deploy some additional observing to look at water samples at depth and also using the so-called flowometer to look at any UV excitement that we see that would be consistent with oil tracking.

OPERATOR: Thank you, sir. Our next from Chris Chmura, WTVT. Your line is open.

Q: Thank you for taking this call. I'm curious if you can draw any conclusion based on the tar balls that washed ashore in Key West and whether that perhaps could be a scenario that could replay itself if in fact the oil is entrained in the Loop Current right now.

MS. LUBCHENCO: Yes, the tar balls that washed ashore in the Florida Keys have – when that happened, we immediately deployed teams to collect those tar balls. They're currently en route to a Coast Guard Marine Safety Lab in Connecticut for analysis.

I think it's useful to note that of the tar balls that have washed ashore to date, some of them have been identified as being affiliated with the BP Deep Horizons (sic) spill. Others have been identified from other sources. So it is important for us to characterize and know exactly what we're dealing with.

I think it is safe to say that the tar balls washing ashore in the Florida Keys are an example of what might happen should oil become entrained in the Loop Current, and that that is

the scenario that we will be anticipating and preparing for, and will be tracking very, very carefully in terms of where the oil is relative to the Loop Current and then mobilizing resources to be prepared accordingly.

OPERATOR: And thank you. Our next from David Fleshler, South Florida Sun-Sentinel.

Q: Yeah, thanks. With the Loop Current, could you just tell us what the forecast is for the next few days as far as winds and just local currents and whether you expect the oil and the Loop Current to draw closer together over the next few days?

MS. LUBCHENCO: Sure. Go ahead, Steve.

MR. MURAWSKY: So this is Steve Murawsky. So right now, it's a very interesting situation. There's a long tendril, as Dr. Lubchenco said, of the oil slick that's being entrained in between the top of the Loop Current and an eddy that's spinning off to the top.

And so it's sort of like you've seen, like, a fast pitch machine between two wheels – this is exactly the analogy, where the tendril is going to go through those two opposite spinning wheels. Part of the oil may actually go back northward and part of that oil will probably go southward. We don't know that fraction but the Loop Current currently is off to the west.

As Dr. Lubchenco said in her early notes this morning that the Loop Current meanders north, west, east and south, currently, it's way off to the west. And so it's very unlikely we're going to see anything on the West Florida Coast. And we would expect, if we do get southern-produced oil or tar balls, that it would go directly due south and then through the Florida Straits.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next, Andy Miller, ABC News.

Q: Thanks, guys. I'm understanding that the current and the slick are both dynamic, changing factors. Is there some sort of worst-case scenario that you're preparing for right now in terms of how far up the East Coast oil could reach if it does get slung around onto the west side of Florida?

MS. LUBCHENCO: I think the answer is that a lot depends on what the ocean currents do and what the winds do in terms of actual transport. This will remain a very dynamic situation that we will continue to track very, very closely. The models that we have show that if oil is entrained in the Loop Current and is transported up the East Coast, it's not likely to wash ashore very far up the coast and will be transported farther away from the coast. But a lot of that will depend on local surface winds and surface conditions.

OPERATOR: Our next, Matt Rota, Gulf Restoration Network.

Q: Yes, thank you for taking my call. I have a question about some of your statements on the Pelican results. And I guess once you mentioned that they were – some of the reports are misleading, premature and inaccurate. What is NOAA doing to, A, help the people from Pelican

to analyze their data? And are you funding them or are you funding some other outside researchers to verify and augment their data?

MS. LUBCHENCO: NOAA is working closely with a number of academic labs and partners. And the Pelican crew's team was already scheduled to go out on a completely different crew's before the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion happened. When it did, they very quickly repurposed their crews and brought on new instruments and realized that it would be very, very helpful to get additional information and be out on the water as quickly as possible, which they did, and that's absolutely terrific.

They have just gotten back into port. They did discover some anomalies that are still unexplained. They took a lot of samples; those samples are in the process of being analyzed. The information from the instruments suggests that there is something of interest there. But the identification of exactly what that is remains to be determined with any certainty. I think it's appropriate to note that science is a dynamic process and we're in the very early stages of discovery with respect to this particular phenomenon.

NOAA is also in communication with other universities, other research vessels associated with those universities in the Gulf region and elsewhere, as well as our partners and other federal agencies. And we are all redeploying assets to the region, if they're not there already, so that we have much more intense sampling to track and stay on top of all of the possible movements of oil and track its impact.

MR. KENNEY: And Operator, we have time for one more call here, please. One more question, I mean.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Mark Schleifstein with the Times. Your line is open.

Q: Yes, Ms. Lubchenco, in terms of the amounts of oil that may or may not be in the water, comma, if there are indeed large quantities found, will there be any efforts required of BP to try to recover that oil or better disperse it, make it disappear? And specifically, are there any plans to do that in the context of either the coral reefs that are on the north slope of the Gulf of Mexico or the reefs that are part of the Florida Keys?

MS. LUBCHENCO: Mark, nice to talk to you. It's not clear at this point what actions will be appropriate. BP has made a commitment to be very responsible in this, to fund all of the actions that are required and they are working closely with the Unified Command to do so. I frankly don't know all of the answers to your questions and I think that's something that the federal family will continue to work on in the days and months to come.

I did want to add one more note to the previous question about the samples from the Pelican. Understanding the urgency of getting clarity of what is in the samples that they took, we have worked with them and they're in the process of splitting each sample so that we will be able to help conduct some of the analyses in parallel to the ones that they will be writing with the idea of speeding up the analyses and getting information in as timely a fashion as possible.

In closing, I want to just reiterate a couple of points. One is that the oil, when it gets – if it gets into the Loop Current, will become very, very dilute and will be highly weathered. And it's important to note that the state that it will be in will continue to change as it moves farther and farther along, so as it travels, it will become more highly weathered and more dilute.

And secondly, I would simply reiterate that our response to all this will continue to be very aggressive and continue to be focused on understanding exactly what's happening, anticipating what might happen, preparing the appropriate assets on the shore and on the water with the idea of minimizing and mitigating the potential impacts.

MR. KENNEY: Thank you, Dr. Lubchenco, and thank you, Operator. At this time, we are finished with this call. Thank you very much.

(END)